RESTORATION REVIEW

Leroy Garrett, Editor

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If God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't He more surely care for you, O men of little faith? – *Matt. 7:30*

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The Word Abused . . .

"NOT FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLY"

The scriptures are often abused through prooftexting, which means that certain passages are lifted from their contexts and made to apply to conclusions already presumed. This has been horrendously done to Heb. 10:25, which reads in the *King James* "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." It is presumed that believers are under absolute and arbitrary obligation to be present at all meetings of their congregation, and this verse is the text to prove it. "Forsaking the assembly" is thus equated with "missing church," which is often described as one of the necessary five acts of public worship. If one gets to the assembly each time the doors open, we can check off item number one: he *has* assembled. He is to proceed to the other four. We are told that this is what Heb. 10:25 is talking about.

Parents will impose upon their young children by taking them to several adult-oriented services every week, some of them being at night, forcing the children to sleep or play their way through the hours —lest they "forsake the assembly." Brethren will leave company at home, people that they might well win to the Lord through tender loving care, in order to be in their pew when the doors open even on a Sunday or Wednesday evening. To do otherwise would be *forsaking* the assembly. *Forsaking*, mind you! To miss church now and again, however important one's mission might be, is to *forsake* the assembly!

Some of our hard-working brothers and sisters might do the right thing by staying home with their families, by going to bed early, or by visiting grandmother or a neighbor, rather than to be going to church all time. But the System has latched on to Heb. 10:25 as a prooftext, and it is made to mean that "you've got to be here" or you are sinning by forsaking the assembly. Brethren will drag themselves to meeting even with splitting headaches ("You'd go to work if you didn't feel well, wouldn't you?" has been part of the harangue), so as not to violate what he has been led to believe is a mandate —be there or you are forsaking!

We all occasionally hear of the brother or sister "who has not missed communion" for 30 or 40 or 50 years, not even once. We are to presume that this adds up to lots of Brownie points. Since my immersion at age 16 I have assembled with the saints every Lord's day save perhaps two or three times that I was hospitalized, but I do not see this as having any particular relevance to Heb. 10:25, and I certainly do not view it as a record of good works. If I had missed, say a 100 times, during those years, for reasons that would be consistent with my Christian profession, I would not conclude that I had violated Heb. 10:25 or forsaken the assembly on all those occasions. I can hear myself saying to a

brother afterwards, “We surely did miss being there, but the girl next door went into labor just as we went out to the car, so we had to get her to the hospital.” Or I might say to Ouida as we drive by the park on the way to the assembly, “Look at that child over there wandering about and crying, obviously lost, and in danger of falling into the pond. We’ll just have to stop and help, church or no church.”

But many brethren insist that the assembly “cannot be forsaken” for any reason within one’s control, physical incapacitation being the only excuse. The working man might also be excused for missing Sunday a. m., if he is present for the evening service and breaks bread then, which has given rise to our second serving of the Supper. If the ox is in a ditch or a neighbor is in need, they will just have to wait until after the assembly. You’ll hear brethren say that they would not “forsake the assembly” in order to stop and render aid to victims of a car wreck. They wouldn’t leave the Lord waiting like that! Such illustrates how we abuse the scriptures so as to uphold a System that puts rules before persons, the very thing that Jesus sought to correct in the religion of the Pharisees.

Jesus healed a blind man on the sabbath, according to John 9, and one would suppose that everyone would rejoice in his good fortune. But the Pharisees could think of but one thing: *it was done on the sabbath*, and according to their interpretation one was not to spit in the manner that Jesus did, so as to make an ointment (one could spit only on a smooth surface), So, they finally abused the man who once was blind because he would not go along with their legalistic ways. Jesus afterwards explained to the man, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.” When the Pharisees overheard the remark, they asked him if he considered them blind. He replied, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.”

It is a sobering lesson for those of us who presume to have all the answers about regulations for the Lord’s day. Jesus told the Pharisees that man was not made for the sabbath, as they seemed to think, but that the sabbath was made for man. That means that man’s welfare comes before the sabbath. The sabbath is for his good, but if his good is in some way threatened, then the sabbath may be sacrificed in order to meet that threat. Surely this would also be true of the Lord’s day. *Of course* the disciple is to gather with the saints at the appointed times, for it is a natural expression of the relationship he sustains with them and the Lord. And it is for his good —his upbuilding and encouragement. But if the welfare of persons is at issue, whether his welfare or someone else’s, he should *first* take care of the emergency, and then take his place in the assembly. If he occasionally misses a meeting, he is as much in service to God while changing a tire for some stranded old couple than when he sits in the meetinghouse. Heb. 10:25 does *not* teach that he then and there *forsakes* the assembly when he elects to render aid in an emergency rather than to be at meeting at the appointed time.

While we are at it, it is just as well that we distinguish between the Lord's day assembly for the breaking of bread, which we can defend as ordained by the apostles, and other congregational meetings that are of our own creation. Some churches will have two or three, sometimes more, meetings each week in addition to the appointed gathering for the breaking of bread. Many churches will have "gospel meetings" from one to three times a year, which call for nightly attendance for a week or more at a time. It is not unusual for a church's programs to take 150 evenings a year of a family's time *besides* that one assembly each week for the Supper, which most of us will accept as the one God-ordained assembly.

The ploy in al1 this is that if the elders have decided on such meetings, then they too are a "must" —God ordained perhaps —and the brethren are obligated to attend *all* such meetings at the peril of violating Heb. 10:25. So it is rather common for the ones who attend on Sunday a. m. to be put down for not being there at the other occasions —and the changes are you'll hear Heb. 10:25 quoted. When in all probability Heb. 10:25 isn't even talking about the main gathering on Lord's day, but more on that later.

Our holy Wednesday night is our own idea, and perhaps a good one, especial1y if it is made an evening of serious study together rather than one more instance where brethren become spectators for still another sermon. Heaven help us! "Gospel meetings" for the most part ineffective since they attract only those already members, many of whom would not be there themselves if they were not kept frightened by Heb. 10:25. That isn't the scriptural way to evangelize anyhow. Since when are believers to badger folk into "going to church" so as to hear the gospel? The believer himself will tel1 the sinner about Jesus, and once he too becomes a believer he will be taken to the assembly and introduced.

Our folk are kept so busy "going to church" that they hardly have time to serve the Lord. When I suggest to our leaders that we discard the Sunday evening service and make it an evening of visitation or studies in various homes, so as to extend our outreach, I am told that the brethren won't do that. So we go right on corralling them once more, imposing still more sermons on them, which no one pays much attention to. While we should assemble to worship and scatter to preach, we are always assembling and never scattering.

It is a common scene in our churches on a Sunday or Wednesday evening to see a young couple gathering up their sleepy children fol1owing one more boring experience. The mother has one child in her arms, the father another one across his shoulder, while the six-year-old is tugged out the aisle on his daddy's hand, yawning every step of the way — the child that is! That is the *closing* scene. The opening scene is the parents trying to keep the kids quiet and out of each other's hair. Final1y that blessed moment comes when they fall asleep. It is al1 a rather oppressive scene. But then there is Heb. 10:25.

It would be liberating if some gracious shepherd of the flock could say to such families: “These Sunday and Wednesday evening gatherings are for the convenience of some of our people, but with your little ones it might not be the case with you. Why don’t you have your own church with them at home? Read some stories to them that they would enjoy together, and then put them to bed early. Then you two might have an hour or so of quiet together and be better ready for work the next day.” But to say such, which of course makes all the sense in the world, he has to become free from the assault of Heb. 10:25. You can’t advise a family to “forsake the assembly,” even if it would be a blessing to them!

On any of our holy Wednesdays in an urban area like Dal1as there are thousands of brethren making their way to still another nightly assembly. If their cars had a halo about them and it must be something like that and if one watched from a helicopter, he would see these hundreds of cars streaking down the freeways and streets of Dallas to our scores of buildings. After an hour or so they would all streak back, the halos gracing all parts of the city, even to the outlying suburbs. It is a vast project of sermon-listening, or, at best, a period of Bible study. Every Wednesday this goes on, year in and year out. Some brethren have logged upwards of 2,000 holy Wednesdays, with hardly a miss, and if that doesn’t score up those Brownie points, pray tell me what would.

Dallas is a city of hundreds of hospitals and nursing homes. And thousands of shutins, many of whom are our own folk. And tens of thousands of lonely souls, people hardly ever cal1ed on by anybody, many of them are completely “unchurched.” Suppose we look down from the helicopter one holy Wednesday night and see these haloed cars behaving erratically. Instead of the usual route to the meetinghouses they peel out of the traffic and stop at hospitals, nursing homes, jails, orphanages, private homes, and retirement villages. Some read to the blind, some write letters for the aged, some frolic with kids at a park, some babysit for a working mother that has no other free night, some sit with the sick, some listen to troubled youth at halfway houses, some engage in Bible study with a neighbor.

Sounds great, doesn’t it? That would be the Body of Christ at work, out among the people where the Body should be, just as Jesus was. But what about the Wednesday evening assembly that the elders have made holy by presbyterial fiat. The Dallas saints would be “forsaking the assembly” while out serving the Lord like that!

What then is the real import of Heb. 10:25? As with most of the New Covenant scriptures, *Hebrews* arose out of a contingency, the circumstance being the possible apostasy of the Hebrew disciples in Jerusalem or Rome, or maybe Caesarea or Antioch. They were in danger of “an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God” (3:12). After being enlightened and having tasted the heavenly gift and having become partakers of the Holy Spirit, they were in peril of committing apostasy and

crucifying the Son of God afresh (6:5-6). They had suffered persecution for their faith, even by being publicly exposed, but their faith was now wavering and they were about to throw it all away (10:32-35). They may have been exiles due to the persecution, but, in any case, they longed for the security that temple ritual afforded, and they were tempted to go back to that old system, giving up their freedom in Jesus. The writer is urging them to be faithful, so he is suggesting some *practical* ways to accomplish this, along with all the weightier theological stuff he feeds them.

One thing they were to do was to meet frequently and encourage one another, which is an effective maneuver whether you are a part of a team selling Fuller brushes or a commando squad preparing for a raid. Every coach or platoon leader knows the importance of mutual encouragement. So the writer of *Hebrews* is instructing this Jewish community to "exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (3:13). By this time they really should have been teachers, but still they had to be taught the first principles of God's word (6:12), and the writer was hopeful that in their frequent gatherings they would be able to teach and encourage each other in the faith so as not to surrender what they had gained in Christ.

This is the context of Heb. 10:25 . Beginning with verse 19, the writer is urging upon them the *confidence* that the blood of Jesus provides. Since Jesus is the believer's high priest "let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (verses 21-22) and "hold fast the confession of our hope, for he who promised is faithful" (verse 23). In verse 24 he tells them they are to "stir up one another to love and good works," and in verse 25 he says this is to be done in their meetings together—"not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (RSV)

The situation is made the more dramatic by the impending crisis of the coming of the Roman army and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. The meetings are especially needful in that they will bolster the faith and strengthen the will of those who have great hardship to bear. And so he says, "so much the more as you see the Day drawing nigh," that is, the day of destruction of city and temple as foretold by the Lord. Some see this as the Day of Judgement, which is not likely.

The writer's thinking is clear enough: *meetings and mutual sharing go together.* If they don't keep up their meetings, they will not encourage each other as much. "Not neglecting to meet together" stands over against "but encourage one another." There is no reference to what we sometimes call *corporate worship* or to the Lord's day assembly as such. It may have included this, but it is not likely. If a missionary to the Orient, back home on furlough, should hear that some of his converts were about to slip back to their pagan ways, and he had learned that they grew great strength by being together in each other's homes for study and prayer, he might well urge them by letter: "Remember how encourag-

ing those house meetings are to you, and don't neglect them." He might write this without even thinking about the Lord's day assembly, and if I were making a guess, in view of what is said in *Hebrews*, I would say that Heb. 10:25 is referring to all those little gatherings wherein those Christian Jews buoyed each other up, quite apart from the Lord's day, even if we suppose that they had grown sufficiently to be observing Sunday instead of, or in addition to, their old Jewish Sabbath, which we do not know.

In any event, it is rather odd that in our time we use a passage that is calculated to provide for *mutual* edification, virtually browbeating folks with it, so that they "go to church" as spectators, seldom sharing with each other, but listening once again to the preacher. Heb. 10:25 is urging those kinds of meetings where we "stir one another up to love and good works," but we use the passage to keep people at church all time so they will have less occasion to do the good works that they might otherwise be encouraged to do.

The practice of "sharing sessions" was by no means new for the Jews, for it reaches back at least as far as the Babylonian exile, where, separated from their ritual, they turned to mutual ministry. Mal. 3:16 refers to such meetings: "Those who feared the Lord spoke with one another; the Lord heeded and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and thought on his name."

For our time the best application of Heb. 10:25 seems to be the prayer groups and house churches where folk are getting a lot of encouragement, some of them actually saved from, apostasy by such gatherings. Any of us might urge such ones, who might otherwise give up their faith: "Keep on with those meetings, encouraging one another, and doq't neglect them." That would be in the spirit of Heb. 10:25.

As for the Lord's day assembly, as well as other meetings a congregation decides to have, it goes without saying that every member should respond responsibly to them all. This he will do because he is a disciple of Jesus. The very meaning of the Body of Christ implies this. Either he will be at the meetings or he will be doing something equally responsible for Jesus' sake. During exam week the teachers and the kids may be unduly pressed for time. Physicians may be on call, just as trouble-shooting electricians might be. The point is that if one loves Jesus, he is going to be loving him whatever the' assignment is at the time. Except for very unusual circumstances, we'll all gather on Lord's day to break bread with each other and the Lord. The "extra meetings" we'll want to attend because we love each other, if for no other reason. But it will be a soft sell. If brethren are not there, we will assume that they are doing something else for Jesus that may be even more important. We certainly will not assault each other with Heb. 10:25, which has no relevance to such situations.

As for the brother who has "quit church" and no longer seems to love Jesus or his fellow disciples, I can't see that the writer of Heb. 10:25 has the likes of such ones in mind at all in what he says. But it might in some way be made to apply to such. But the problem with such fallen brethren is not that they have "forsaken the assembly," but that they no longer love the Lord. Such ones need a lot more than having prooftexts thrown at them.

As for those who insist that the church has ample time to gather on Sunday and Wednesday evenings, as well as other occasions, and still have time to go out and do the Lord's work, I have no quarrel with them. I would only hope that such meetings would be mutually edifying and calculated to cultivate Body ministry. I am only asking that we not make them a matter of divine fiat, and abuse Heb. 10:25 in doing so. - *the Editor*

"The Churches of Christ Salute You"

For decades now our people have scribbled it, painted it, embossed it, lettered it, engraved it, and drawn it on letterheads, calling cards, newspaper ads, billboards, signs, and bumper stickers. *The churches of Christ salute you!* That is in the Bible, of course, Ro. 16:16, and it is talking about us —not about us in general, but about us *exclusively!* That happens to be our name, the one we write, print, paint, letter, and engrave everywhere, and the only name we so honor. We really aren't all that interested in *saluting* people, which means to greet or welcome, but since that is the context in which "Church of Christ" appears in the scriptures, in the plural at least, we'll settle for saluting everybody.

Our folk have always liked the story of how one of our members was standing by while a neighbor erected a sign reading *Baptist Church.* "I'll give you ten dollars if you'll put underneath the words *This is a Church of Christ,"* he said to the Baptist, with what we may presume was with an element of our usual arrogance. "I guess I can't do that," protested the neighbor, "for this is a Baptist Church." "Then I'll give you ten dollars if you'll put on it *This is NOT a Church of Christ."*

The story nearly always brings a laugh. Nothing like being rightly named, you know. But the story has a sequel these days. The Church of Christ man was putting up *his* sign and the Baptist was standing by. "I'll give you ten dollars to put under the name *Church of Christ* the sentence *This is a Church of God,"* said the Baptist, now having his turn at arrogance. When the brother demurred, the Baptist said, "Then I'll give you ten dollars if you'll put *This is NOT a Church of God."*

The fallacy of this kind of in-fighting, as well as these rather naive references to Ro. 16:16, is to assume that the church is named to start with, that it has any kind of name at all. If the community of the New Covenant has any name at all, then it is a denomination, which is what that term means. It is a contradiction to say that it is named "The Church of Christ" or "The Church of God" and also say that it is not a denomination. My position is that the church of Jesus Christ has no name at all, and so I can also say it is therefore not a denomination.

Paul wrote to the Romans in about 57 A. D. from Corinth when he was well along in his missionary career. He had a vast knowledge of the young churches scattered over the Mediterranean world, many of which had begun from his own labors. At the close of the letter he is sending greetings from some of these churches to those saints in faraway Rome. "All the churches of Christ send greetings," he wrote to them, which reflects his veneration for these brothers that he longed to see, having not yet met. The faith of the Roman church had been "proclaimed in all the world," so it was appropriate for the other churches to pay their respects. It is a tender greeting from those struggling communities of saints to the church in the very heart of imperial Rome, all of them suffering for their faith together. He is saying something like *All the congregations of Christ in this region of Corinth, Cenchrea, and all the province of Achaia, struggling in the faith just as yourselves, send their love and respect in the Lord.*

Such a greeting was *in the Lord,* from one believer to another, just as Paul's amanuensis did in the same chapter: "I, Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord." It is hardly a greeting to be paraded before the world on signs and billboards. So, isn't it a bit theatrical of us, if not asinine, to use Ro. 16:16 the way we have. It could well be interpreted as saying: *See, our name is in the Bible; how about yours?* The response could well be, from some denominations at least, "Well, ours is in there more times than yours, so there!" All I can say to that is that it is a good thing that Paul had Tertius write "the churches of Christ" or "our name" would have missed the scriptures completely. He had just written at least two letters to Corinth (from which he wrote *Romans),* and in both of them he addressed them as "the church of God," and in that correspondence he refers to "church of God" or "churches of God" four other times. But that one time in Ro. 16:16 he used "churches of Christ," which is as rare as "churches of the saints" in 1 Cor. 14:33. Even Clement of Rome, writing about 95 A. D., doesn't help us a bit, in his *Epistle to the Corinthians,* which begins: "The Church of God which sojourns at Rome, to the Church of God sojourning at Corinth, to them that are called and sanctified by the will of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

If we were in search of a *name,* "Church of God" would be the obvious one, but that is hardly how it came about. Our pioneers from 1804 onward shunned any name at all for the church, calling themselves Christians. Disciples, Reformers, while their neighbors dubbed

them "Stoneites," "Campbellites," and even "Reformed Baptists." *Church of Christ* was rarely, but sometimes, used for their congregations. To this day there stands in Bethany the old brick building that housed the Brush Run congregation once it moved to Bethany in 1827, and bears in the stone above the door "Church of Christ." As the years passed *Disciples of Christ* and *Christian Church* were the descriptions used by our folk mostly, but sometimes *Church of Christ.* There are some references to the old preachers as "Elder in the Church of Christ."

When the "Church of Christ" as we know it today began on August 17, 1 889 (see our January issue on *The Birthday of the Church of Christ*), that was the name that had begun to emerge among those who were breaking away and rejecting the others as brothers, for it was the name least used by the others. So, once we had our own distinct faction we had our own distinct name, and we prooftexted our way to Ro. 16:16 —and finally to all the billboards and cornerstones.

But the most serious abuse of this scripture is to use it in such a way as to imply that *we,* our group of churches and ours alone, are "the churches of Christ" referred to by the Holy Spirit. The Church of Christ is the Body of Christ, and it is made up of all those everywhere who are in Jesus, washed by "the bath of regeneration" and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Surely many of these are in "Churches of Christ," but many are likewise elsewhere. The *Church of Christ* in any given area consists of *all* of God's children, whether they be found among the sects or where, and they are my brothers and sisters. They are not my fellow heirs because they are Baptists or Methodists, but because they believe in Christ and have been baptized into him just as I have.

To quote "the churches of Christ salute you" and apply this to but one group within our tragically divided Christian world is sectarian and factious. The billboard thing is bizarre and theatrical. If we want to erect signs welcoming folk to our assemblies, then we should do so, using "Church of Christ" as the denominational name that it is, and leaving Ro. 16:16 out of it. It would be more honest and less sectarian. To be undenominational in these days of a divided Christendom may be unrealistic. It may well be our ultimate goal, to be sure, but the emphasis now should be to be non-sectarian. And we can be denominational (which we already are —period!) without being sectarian. —*the Editor*

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What Kind of a Book is the Bible . . .

IT IS DIFFICULT!

I was sitting with Ouida recently in a gathering of believers where a young brother read the whole of Eph. 3, which he did rather well. Once it was done, I was reminded once again of the profundity of Paul's thought in such places as *Ephesians.* I whispered to Ouida, *And what does all that mean?,* which was my way of referring once more to the difficulty of scripture. Chances are the lad who read had but the slightest notion of the meaning of what he was reading, and the congregation that listened probably comprehended but little more.

It is common to see people going to meeting with their Bibles, and this is as it should be. But it is a good guess that, with but few exceptions, they are bearing along a volume that they know little about. We all believe in the Bible —we are *for* it, so to speak but if we are honest with ourselves about it we find a great deal of it terribly boring and still more of it completely incomprehensible. We therefore have our special sections and favorite passages, which we can handle fairly well, though we often see these apart from their contexts, and it is doubtful if even these are really understood.

One reason for this is that the church has not taken the teaching of scripture seriously. Modern sermonizing may be pleasant and encouraging, but it is hardly an effective method of instruction. Kids in school do not learn reading, writing and arithmetic that way. If a professor should attempt to teach Shakespeare at the superficial level that our churches handle the scriptures, his students would be denied the deeper insights into the likes of *Hamlet* and *King Lear.* And surely much of the Bible is as difficult or more difficult than Shakespeare.

Another reason is that the Bible is viewed more as a symbol or an idol rather than as a study text for believers. Many churches have an open Bible on the lecturn or on a table, opened perhaps to Psa. 119, which happens to be the middle, as if in itself it were something *holy.* No one ever reads such a Bible, or hardly ever. Bu t it is not there to be read. It serves as a symbol of some kind. Bibles often grace tables and mantles at home for the same reason, and of course the bride must carry one, a *white* one, between her palms as she walks to the altar. Such bibles may as well have blank pages, for surely they are never read. It is ludicrous in a way, to see a bride stepping down the aisle to the wedding march, with Daddy on her arm and the book of Leviticus in her hands!

Should the Bible really be that kind of a book? These symbolic and idolatrous (?) uses of the scriptures are at best questionable. It is as if the scriptures *as a book* were "a channel of grace," the term Roman Catholics are pleased to attach to the Virgin Mary. They do not really worship her, they tell us, but she stands between them and God as "a channel of grace." The theologians call this hypostasis, which results from man's hesitancy to come face to face with God. He can handle it better if it is something closer to himself, like another person — or a book!

People must get the impression, from the way we view the Bible, that we are inviting them to believe in a book. The Book is the big deal. But this could not have been the case with the earliest disciples, for they had no such book that we now call the Bible. Many of them lived and died without such a book. They had a Person, and it is to this Person of the scriptures that we are to invite people. The book points to him, not he to the book. It was out of their experience with Jesus that the New Covenant scriptures came to be written.

A lot of our mishandling of scripture might be corrected if we will but accept one obvious fact: *the literature that makes up the Bible is for the most part very difficult material to handle.* If those of us making up Churches of Christ are divided 15 or 20 different ways because of our inability to interpret alike, and if this is multiplied twenty times over in the larger Christian world, how can we go on glibly parroting the old refrain, "If people would just be honest and take it for what it says, we would all understand it alike."

Perhaps you haven't thought about it, but the idea of everybody having a Bible is a new thing in the history of the church, being no earlier than the early 1800's. It not only took the invention of movable type, which did not come until the 15th century, but the means of mass production and the affluence to go with it, which came much later. Even if the Bible had been available on mass basis through all those centuries, the people would have been too poor to have owned one and too ignorant to have read one if they did own one.

So it is a comparatively new experience for the church for everyone to have his own copy (or several copies) of the scriptures. Of all those untold millions that have made up the community of God through the centuries, we who have our own volume of scriptures to read for ourselves are a very small minority. Many would of course have heard the scriptures read, some would have portions of them in hand, and some would have scriptures reflected in hymns, poems, catechisms, and the like. But for the most part, through most all of history, the church has not had the Bible in anything like the way we do now.

When we take our own Bible into hand to study for ourselves, we should recognize, therefore, that we are sharing in something new. We should not be too surprised if all does not go smoothly. If we presume that it is God's will for everyone to have a Bible, we must concede that He has been a very long time getting around to it, 1800 years in fact.

One thing this has to mean is that a believer does not necessarily have to understand the scriptures in order to be saved. Good for us all that it is that way! If our brethren through the ages did not even have a Bible of their own, then they could hardly be held responsible for mastering it. But they did have Jesus, and they had means of knowing something of his will for them, especially the oral tradition and what they heard read in the assemblies, and to this they were responsible. It could be argued that since we are blessed

with Bibles of our own, and the literacy to read them, that we are all the more responsible. While this is no doubt the case, we can press too far the responsibility of comprehension. Most people do very little reading of any kind that reaches beyond newspapers and magazines. Even college graduates read surprisingly little, according to the surveys. We who are in the education business believe that this should be otherwise, but it is just as well that we face up to the facts.

To impose a book like the Bible upon such a people and expect them to read it and understand it with facility is to be foolish. People who were bored with what little history they had in school are suddenly thrust into thousands of years of intricate history that is unevenly recorded. Literature that calls for some understanding of anthropology, paleontology, zoology, geography, archeology, and the history of cultures, along with loads of background material, is stuff that most people will not even try to handle, and those who do are likely to be both discouraged and baffled.

I am saying that we do not only *not* have to understand the Bible alike, but we do not have to understand it at all. What people really mean by that silly bromide, *We can all understand it alike,* is that they can understand the beaten path that some sect makes through the Bible, if they walk in the same party shoes!

But in saying that a certain body of literature like the Bible is difficult to understand is not to say that it cannot be understood. Some in the church, who give a lifetime of study to the task, cultivate a remarkable understanding of the scriptures, and thank God for them. They are our teachers, and we are heavily indebted to them for better translations and helpful commentaries. But the difficulty of their task is seen in the fact that even they, with all their background, do not understand the scriptures alike.

Neither does the difficulty of the Bible mean that there isn’t much that we can all gain by a diligent reading of it, even those of us with limited education. If we pore over our lessons, saturating ourselves with what is said, we will likely all learn more than we will ever appropriate. Somebody said, maybe it was Will Rogers, that he was bothered more by what he *did* understand in the Bible than by what he did *not* understand. But if we are serious about learning we should seek out help, for the Bible is a book that needs to be taught.

Old Raccoon John Smith is a good example of this, being as he was a man of limited resources who hungered for understanding. For two hours he heard Alexander Campbell speak on Gal. 4, relative to Sarah and Hagar and the two covenants, the first time he had seen and heard him. The time went so fast that he thought Campbell had taken but half an hour. While he didn’t know what had happened to the other hour and a half, he realized that the reformer from Bethany, be he saint or sinner, had done more to unfold the scriptures to him that evening than all his previous years of study.

This shows how people need help. His background being what it was, old Raccoon almost certainly would have never learned what he did without Campbell's help. But he didn't *have* to understand about the two covenants in order to go to heaven, but he did need the lesson in view of the work God had cut out for him. Knowledge enriches and blesses, and it enables us to help others, but it does not save.

This takes us back to Eph. 3 that the young man read in the assembly. A good teacher could open up that passage in such a way that the hearers would gain insights into it that they almost certainly would never get on their own. And this is why God placed teachers in the church. It is clear that we are not all to be teachers, and if we took this office more seriously we would have better teachers and more responsible teaching.

In saying all this I want to make it clear that it is the Bible that I am describing as difficult, not the gospel, and the difference is most important. If the church through the centuries had the scriptures in only a very limited way, it most certainly had the gospel. It was the New Covenant that made the Body of Christ, and it was that Body that eventually through the centuries gave us the New Covenant *scriptures.* I am not saying, just as Peter was not saying, that the New Covenant is hard to understand, but that the New Covenant *scriptures*, written by Paul and others is hard to understand, which some wrest to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16).

The gospel is the Message of salvation, the story of what God has done through Christ, the Good News of redemption. As with all good news, its facts are simple, it commands and promises clear. When sinners respond to the Good News and come into relationship with Christ, they are a part of the New Covenant. So it was with the early Christians, long before there were any scriptures growing out of that New Covenant.

Once those scriptures were written, including the "hard to understand" stuff that Peter says Paul wrote, and were then combined with all those scriptures of the Old Covenant, you have a compilation of material that is *very difficult* to handle. And so we are challenged by a lifetime of study, realizing all along that a perfect understanding is not required of us anymore than it is possible for us.

With this more realistic and relaxed attitude about the Bible we are more likely to get more out of it, without making it either a symbol or an idol. —*the Editor*

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Notes from a Travel Diary . . .

DRAMA ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER

The series on my trip to Europe has dominated this section for the past several months, so we are eager to get on with the business of sharing with you some of the things the Lord is letting me in on in fields nearer home. Since returning from Europe I have been to St. Louis, Louisville, Gallup (N. M.), EI Paso, New Orleans, Waco and Austin (Tx.), and Phoenix. There has been excitement around every corner, and the people I come to know surely must be among the most interesting and beautiful in the world. These are almost altogether my own Church of Christ folk, and being with them only confirms my longstanding conviction that we are a growing people, changing in a way that can best be described as dramatic.

There is no way to share with you *all* the drama, but I do want to report on some of the highlights and bring you up to date somewhat on what has been going on in my part of the world.

The most exciting experience of all was a Sunday afternoon in Juarez, Mexico, across from El Paso, with Vic and Gloria Richards. We sometimes have to wait many years to see the subtle means used of the Lord to realize his purpose. Vic revealed to me on this trip that it was a letter I wrote to him many years ago, suggesting that he get acquainted with the Spanish work being done by Woodrow Wilson and the Downtown Church of Christ. This was while he was in the Army in El Paso and at a time when his ministry was in limbo. He could not then so much as give a greeting in Spanish, and he had no interest in a Spanish ministry, but he is today wonderfully fluent and articulate in the language and is engaged *in* a radio ministry that goes out over nine radio stations and covers a large part of Mexico. His lessons cover everything from how to have a happy home and rear a family to those gracious stories that tell of God’s love and mercy. I am thankful for Vic and Gloria, so beautiful are they in body and soul alike, and it buoys one up to see a family like theirs dedicated to the gospel of the grace of God, serving the people that need them most and doing it so well.

After having dinner with the Richards in El Paso, along with a handsome Spanish couple that they had led to the Lord, the man being active in business in Juarez, we went across the border for a baptismal service. Vic preaches over a Juarez radio station and has occasional meetings in a rented auditorium, where he attracts respectable audiences, including some of the clerical leaders. This represents a change in method for him, for his manner is now more solicitous and cooperative. He has convinced the Latin clergy that he is no more “Protestant” than he is Roman Catholic, for he is not trying to separate people from their churches, but rather to lead them to Jesus, or, if they are already believers, to bring them closer to Jesus and make them better Christians.

We gathered in the home of the Latin couple referred to above, a “rich” home by Mexican standards, and it was apparent that the poor were reluctant to enter the premises, the class distinctions being what they are. But once the large crowd was urged to enter, Vic proclaimed the gospel with ringing clarity, with special attention given to the place of immersion. The ground was so familiar that I could follow somewhat even in Spanish, but Gloria was at my side to fill me in. A priest had insisted to some in the group that they needed no further baptism, once sprinkled in the Roman Catholic faith, so Vic gave that matter some attention.

We then repaired to the yard where a portable baptistry on wheels had been rolled in. Vic stood on one side and I on the other, and that afternoon we immersed 27 Roman Catholics into Christ. There were, I believe, six couples, husbands and wives immersed together. In those cases, we immersed the man first, then had him assist in the immersion of his wife. In several instances Vic paused to ask the one who had stepped into the tank if he had an addiction. He would then ask God to deliver the person from the addiction as well as his sins before we immersed him. He explained to me later than many of the Mexicans were on some form of dope. One girl stepped into the pool weeping, and after some counseling and prayer we immersed her, Vic confiding to me, “She has a special problem.” It turned out to be a severe case of hatred that she could not handle. It left me thinking: Vic could just as well bring that way of doing things north of the border!

I will always remember Vic’s radiant face as he asked each believer stepping into the water, *Le ama? Do you love Him?* Some clutched their crucifix hanging around their neck as they answered in the affirmative, often with great feeling. A few crossed themselves and raised their arms in praise, crying out in their native tongue, “Yes, senor, I love Him!” It gave me special delight to bury into Christ people with faith like that. And they just kept coming out of the crowd that had gathered. When Vic asked afterwards how many had seen an immersion for the first time ever, almost every hand went up. I then explained, with Vic translating, that they had seen the way that Jesus’ was baptized, and that that is one good reason why we should all be baptized, *because* he was and *like* he was.

I thought of those 27 Roman Catholics, now believers who had perfected their obedience to Jesus in baptism, back at Mass in their own church, still within their own religious culture and not “Americanized,” and still Mexicans. I thought of standing in front of Lady of Guadalupe and saying to myself, “There’s a Church of Christ in there!” Should they be separated and formed into the kind of “Church of Christ” you find over in El Paso — or Fort Worth? Should they be separated at all? Vic and I talked about that, of course. It is right to immerse believers into Christ, and, yes, under normal conditions the evangelist would then form them into a congregation and teach them how to keep house for the Lord.

We decided he should allow the Lord to lead. Preach the gospel and baptize, and keep on doing it; and, if possible, without antagonizing the powers that be, which is the Roman clergy. Vic hopes that if he cultivates friendship with the priests, sharing with them the Jesus he has come to know, that some of them also will turn to him for grace and mercy, and commence a renewal *within* the Roman church that will reach all of Mexico, without anyone "leaving" to join an American church, as they would interpret it. So, he doesn't try to get anyone to leave the Roman church, but only to obey Jesus in all things. This causes them to view him as a reformer, but not as a Protestant heretic. He is especially interested in reaching influential people — the affluent, the politicians, the professionals — who in turn put the pressure on the priests to do some changing. After all, in the scriptures no one is ever urged to leave other *believers,* but rather the pagans and disbelievers. What power might be ours once we catch the vision of working *within* the churches, capturing them for Jesus' sake and renewing them by his grace and truth, and using their own people to do it!

The alternative is to go among such people, bringing as it were a different culture, uprooting them from all they've ever known, separating them from friends and kin. Along with it both priests and politicians block your every move, believing you to be an agitator who is interested only in building his own sect. To the extent possible, we should avoid such confrontations.

On our side of the border in El Paso I had a happy weekend with the Downtown Church of Christ, where Woodrow Wilson has labored for many years, ministering to a bilingual community of believers. Woody is like Jesus in that the poorest of the people are his friends and at the center of his concern. He makes his rounds in El Paso and Juarez, distributing the bare necessities of life along with the gospel, supporting himself as a teacher.

Another unusual experience was with the Baptists at Baylor University in Waco. Jim Sims, who has been preaching in the area among our people while doing graduate work at Baylor, arranged for the Graduate Fellowship Seminar to hear an exchange between Dr. C. W. Christian, Dr. James Leo Garrett, both on the university faculty of religion, and me. They asked me to draw upon Baptist-Disciple relations in history and to relate this to my own ministry in unity, with the two profs responding.

I explained that while our forebears were mostly Presbyterians, both in this country and abroad, the Baptists came to play a crucial role in the Restoration Movement, with many of our pioneer preachers coming from the Baptists — not into another church, but into a Movement "to unite the Christians in all the sects," and I pled for a renewal of that Movement, with all God's people involved. The first Campbell church, Brush Run, belonged to the Redstone Baptist Association, and the second congregation, Wellsburg, to which Alexander Campbell transferred his membership to avoid conflict with the Redstone Baptists, belonged to the Mahoning Baptist Association, which proved to be amicable.

Campbell defended immersion as practiced by the Baptists in his earliest debates with Presbyterians, becoming something of a hero among them for awhile, and he named his first publication the *Christian Baptist.* In those days our folk were often called "Reformed Baptists," even before they were called "Campbellites." There was, of course, no reimmersing of Baptists, for all through those decades our people accepted all as Christians who were immersed believers. In our discussion there was some mutual embarrassment in that the Baptists often rebaptize Church of Christ folk who go to them, while we often reimmerse Baptists who come to us.

Since the Campbell-Stone ministry was a unity movement, it makes a good question as to why the Baptists and the Disciples did not get together. I attributed this to the early antagonisms emanating from the ignorance of the Baptist clergy and the general sectism of the frontier churches, along with the restoration goals of the Disciples that the Baptist leadership could not accept. But Campbell in later life repeatedly asserted that they should never have separated, and he wept with joy on his death bed when he was told that a move was on to unite the two groups, assuring the bearers of the news, "This is the happiest day of my life." Unfortunately, nothing became of the effort, and for the most part the Baptists and Churches of Christ have been estranged all these years, to the shame of us all.

I am gratified that our men can study with the Baptists as they are doing in Waco, Ft. Worth, Louisville, and New Orleans, and especially with the likes of Professors Christian and Garrett, the latter of whom I knew at Harvard, and who is now scheduled to appear on a seminar at Pepperdine which is better than I've been able to do! If the Baptists are now educating a high percentage of our Bible departments in the colleges, it is surely something less than heresy to talk of enjoying fellowship with them. The Waco Baptists seemed to appreciate my emphasis on the fact that there is but one Body of Christ, which is neither "Baptist" nor "Church of Christ." And they took it with a smile when I accepted them as my brothers, "Not because you are Baptists, but because we are in Jesus together."

I have long since quit looking upon people as Baptists, Methodists, or what ever, but as men and women for whom Christ died. If they share the faith in the risen Christ and have responded to the gospel, they are my brothers and sisters. Not Baptist brothers or Church of Christ brothers, but simply brothers. I have no cousins or half-brothers in the Lord. They are all full blood brothers, and I reject the whole sordid mess of sectarianism that presumes to separate us into separate stalls, tempting us to bellow forth our silly shibboleths to one another and to insist that we must cross over into yet another sect as the answer to our divisions.

An interesting by-product of the Baylor meeting, which may be why the Lord wanted me there after all, was that it attracted a Baylor student who is engaged to a Church of Christ girl. The young man was distraught by his rejection by the Church of Christ world into which he is moving. He is quite willing to be married "in the Church of Christ," with

all that that implies, but he doesn't want to feel that he has to give up his Baptist heritage to do this. It was obvious that he wants love and acceptance. His fiance told him she did not know of any of our preachers who would accept him with the understanding that he sought. So, when he saw the ad of this Baylor gathering, between, of all people, Baptists and Church of Christ folk, he had to investigate.

"My fiancé told me there were no Church of Christ preachers that I was hoping for, but I have met several here tonight," he told me afterwards, with obvious joy. He and his future wife, along with her parents — all beautiful and loving people— have since attended two of my meetings down that way. Ouida was with me once and got in on the celebration, and of course they all fell in love with her.

And now comes an invitation from the girl's parents for me to perform the ceremony! I really felt for him when he said to me, weighed down by a feeling of rejection, "I only ask that the preacher who marries us accept me as one who loves Jesus just like he does." Well, bless his heart, his problem is solved now. I never cease to be amazed how Jesus is always putting things together, even in little ways like that, which may not be so little. *Feelings* are important to him. I now chide the couple with, "Now I know why the Lord wanted me at Baylor, for surely it wasn't just to shoot the breeze with those professors of religion."

But if we've eased a couple's problem, we may well have created another problem when I go to that Church of Christ down in Texas hill country for the big event. Well, the Lord will take care of that too, probably with still more surprises. I'm getting so that when I go out, I say to the Lord, "The product I know; I'll be watching for the by-products!" But still he surprises me, and blessed be his name for the dynamic of love! — *the Editor*

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OFFICE NOTES

I will be speaking at the Annual Men's Retreat at West Frankfort, Illinois, June 6-7 on "The Fellowship of the Spirit," followed by a meeting with the old Church of Christ in Lowell, Indiana, June 8-1 2, followed by some visits in the Chicago area. In July I will take the family to Bethany, a northern route there and a southern one back, visiting old friends and churches on the way, which will take a large part of the month. In August I will teach daily at the Week of Ministry at Milligan College, in East Tennessee (Aug. 12-1 5) on something like "Spiritual Values in Restoration History," in which I plan to show that we have not even begun to tap the great historic resources of power left us by our pioneers.

I will be dealing with Robert Richardson in particular, drawing upon his rich essays in Campbell's *Millennial Harbinger* through the years. Bethany and Milligan both make for idea1 family vacations, reasonable in cost and spiritually refreshing.

We have a new supply of *Love Therapy* by Paul D. Morris, which is well received by our readers. This book concerns itself with the application of scripture to the treatment of emotional problems. It reaches deep inside our inner problems, and it speaks helpfully to the discouraged and depressed. Its thesis is that the resources of the Spirit can bring healing and health to body and spirit. Only 2.95.

We keep recommending *Christ the Controversialist* by John R. W. Stott, which is one of the most informative books I've ever read. It takes you right into the stormy controversies between Jesus and Pharisees, and relates it all to the *now.* At 2.50 for 21 3 pages it shows that there are still bargains. But you should add a dollar and get *The Mind Matters* by the same author.

Anders Nygren is famous for his "Agape and Eros," that great book on Christian love. But Eerdmans has republished two of his old essays under the title *Essence of Christianity,* which is well worth the reading. He defines religion and then shows how the Christian faith fu1fills this, spelling out what really makes Christianity what it is. 1.95.

You can get in on the last six months of *Mission Messenger* by sending 1.00 to 139 Signal Hill Dr., St. Louis 631 21. This is Carl Ketcherside's last year of publication and it is predictable that the coming months will be the best of all.

There is a new issue of *Alexander Campbell As A Preacher* by Archibald McLean, who was a president both of Bethany College and the United Christian Missionary Society. It is said of him that he prayed by name every day for every missionary in the field. It is with that devotion that he evaluates Campbell as a preacher. In this 46page booklet are testimonials about Campbell from the likes of President Madison, General Robert E. Lee, Bishop Hurst, Judge Black, Moses Lard, and numerous newspapers of that day who reported on the reformer's preaching. Only 1.00.

We also have a new edition of *The Fool of God* by Louis Cochran, which is a historical novel on the life of Alexander Campbell. In colorful paperback this 406-page work is but 3.50.

Also vital to a study of our history is J. D. Murch's *Christians Only,* which is probably the best survey of the Restoration Movement in print. It is 392 pages and is priced at 5.95.

All who ordered a copy of *The Church of Christ: Yesterday and Today* have been sent their copy. This is our bound volume of this journal for 1973-74, which makes a 400-page book, along with introduction, table of contents, and artistic dust jacket matching our previously bound volumes. This is now available to any of you at 4.95. We now can furnish *Restoration Review* in bound volumes back to 1967. The 1966 volume is no longer available. The single volumes (1967-70) are 3.50 each, 1971-72 double volume is 4.50.

BICENTENNIAL FORUM AT BETHANY

The 10th Annual Unity Forum will be conducted at Bethany College, July 2-5, and it will take on a Bicentennial theme: Our Movement and Our Nation after 200 Years. This is appropriate since our pioneers were builders of a new nation as well as a new movement in religion. Participants from several backgrounds of Christian Churches, Disciples, and Churches of Christ include F. L. Lemley, Gene Shelburne, Paul Eckstein, Perry Gresham, Burton Thurston, Edvin Hayden, and David R. Reagen. Subjects discussed will include the authority of scripture and the meaning of Restoration, along with evaluations of both our nation and our Movement after two centuries. Sharing and praying together will be emphasized. Special services at Campbell mansion and old Brush Run. Meals and lodging are available as low as 40.00 per person for the four days, and there will be lots of free time for swimming, hiking, etc. All who share in this are as free as the men who hallowed those old hills with new insights that jarred the Christian world. You can receive registration forms and information by writing to us or to the Office of Church Relations, Bethany College, Bethany, WV 26032. You'd better not miss this one. Besides, Ouida is going to be there, though she does not plan to deliver an oration. But Perry Gresham and I will do an "Ev and Charley" at the site of the old Brush Run Church, the first congregation of the Campbell movement.

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READERS' EXCHANGE

The people of the faction in which I was raised will discuss and listen somewhat in the lobby, but once the assembly is called to order this friendliness disappears, and I become a knot in the pew. You know so well about this sort of thing. - *Jim Albert, Box 811, Corcoran, Ca. 93212.*

You will never know the joy I felt as I read my first *Restoration Review.* How I came by it I don't know. But to learn that there are others of like faith thrilled me with new joy and hope and courage to continue with Christ. I must confess that I was feeling mighty alone. Kinda like Elijah. My future is uncertain. My reputation as a "sound preacher" has been seriously called in question. I pray the trial of my faith will draw me closer to him who died for me. - *Name Withheld, California.*

The Church of Christ: Yesterday and Today is a beautiful volume and I've re-read most of the articles. Thank you very much. —*John Barnhill, Gatesville, Texas*

(This book, a compilation of this journal for 1973-74, is now available to the public at 4.95.)

I was pleased to be introduced to some of your material in the *Restoration Review.* I remember you from many years ago. I called you a legalist then without realizing how much a legalist I was. Apparently we have both gotten wiser. - *Joe Black, Harlan Park Bible Church, Box* 1226, *Conway, Ar. 72032.*

(The issues that made me a "legalist" a generation ago would still make me one, I presume, for my position remains the same. But something has happened along the way, though I would not describe it as *wisdom.* Something has surely happened to Joe Black, now minister of a *Bible* church. Whoever heard of a "sound" Church of Christ calling itself a "Bible Church"? Every faithful soul knows that we are not a Bible church! - *Ed.*)

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